DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 442 096 CS 014 012

AUTHOR Otuya, Ebo; Krupka, Susan
TITLE Federal and State Strategies To Support Early Reading Achievement.
INSTITUTION Educational Testing Service, Washington, DC.
PUB DATE 1999-01-00
NOTE 29p.
AVAILABLE FROM Educational Testing Service, State and Federal Relations Office, Suite 900, 1800 K. Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20006 Tel: 202-659-0616, Fax: 202-659-8075.
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative (142)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Beginning Reading; *National Standards; Primary Education; *Reading Achievement; *Reading Difficulties; *Reading Instruction; *Reading Readiness; *State Standards
IDENTIFIERS Phonemic Awareness; Reading Excellence Act

ABSTRACT

A study examined children's reading difficulties at the early grade levels and explored how federal and state governments are responding to this critical education problem. Sections of the study address: background issues in reading achievement; federal response to improve poor reading achievement; state issues in early reading achievement; effective intervention programs; and trends in reading assessment. Results indicate that five factors contribute to children's reading difficulties: (1) lack of phoneme awareness; (2) difficulty with reading comprehension; (3) lack of motivation to learn to read; (4) inadequate preparation of teachers; and (5) lack of standards and accountability. Findings suggest that there continues to be a gap between instructional theory and practice, and that as schools implement a balanced approach to reading instruction, adjusted curriculum, textbooks, and assessment models will be needed. Contains 28 references, and a figure and a table of data. (EF)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 442 096

Federal and State Strategies to Support Early Reading Achievement

Ebo Otuya
Susan Krupka

U S DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
E. Otuya
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

January 1999

Educational Testing Service • State and Federal Relations Office
Suite 900 • 1800 K Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20006 • Telephone: 202-659-0616 • Fax: 202-659-8075

CS 014 012

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Federal and State Strategies to Support Early Reading Achievement

Ebo Otuya
Susan Krupka

January 1999

Educational Testing Service
State and Federal Relations Office
1800 K Street, N.W.
Suite 900
Washington, DC 20006
(202) 457-8661
(202) 659-8060

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	i
Background Issues in Reading Achievement	1
Trends in Reading Scores	2
Factors Leading to Reading Difficulties	3
Federal Response to Improve Poor Reading Achievement	5
The Reading Excellence Act	5
21st Century Community Learning Centers	7
Even Start	8
State Issues in Early Reading Achievement	8
New Policy Initiatives	9
Current Approaches and Practices	9
Examples of Current State Policies	10
Effective Intervention Programs	18
Trends in Reading Assessment	19
Conclusions	20
Selected Bibliography	22

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In response to a national concern that 40 percent of our 4th graders are having difficulty learning to read, President Clinton proposed the "America Reads Challenge" initiative in his 1998 State of the Union Address. The goal of this initiative was to provide federal assistance to states and school districts to help children read independently by the end of 3rd grade. Both Congress and the Administration agreed on the need to improve the reading skills of young children, but they were divided on the best approach to accomplish that goal. The President's strategy was to mobilize parents, tutors, and reading specialists to teach children how to read. Congress preferred training more teachers to ensure that they are adequately prepared to teach reading. This led to series of hearings with testimony from reading experts, state officials and educators to determine what constitutes best practices in teaching reading. After much negotiation, the Reading Excellence Act was passed with provisions to do both.

At the same time that federal lawmakers and reading experts appear to be leaning toward a balanced approach to teaching reading, state officials and educators are still debating using either the "whole-language" or the "phonics" method of instruction. This continuing debate in schools exacerbates the gap between instructional theory and practice.

This paper examines children's reading difficulties at the early grade levels and explores how federal and state governments are responding to this critical education problem. We reviewed available literature, examined federal and state laws, and conducted personal interviews. Key findings are summarized below.

- The decline in children's reading skills is a major concern to lawmakers, educators, parents and the general public, as reading is seen to be the foundation for success in all fields.

- Extensive research suggests that at least five factors help to explain why children have reading problems: a lack of phoneme awareness, difficulty with reading comprehension, a lack of motivation to learn to read, inadequate preparation of teachers, and a lack of standards and accountability.

- In response to these reading problems, Congress enacted the "Reading Excellence Act" (H.R. 2614) into law on October 21, 1998. The new law is intended to provide children with the readiness skills and support they need in early grades to learn to read, teach every child to read by the end of 3rd grade, and improve the instructional practices of teachers and other instructional staff in elementary schools.

- The new law authorizes $260 million each for FY 1999 and FY 2000 in competitive grants to states to develop effective reading programs in the early grades based on reliable and replicable research. It also requires that reading programs be evaluated to determine the extent to which children's reading skills have improved and findings reported to appropriate Congressional committees.

- Across the country, many states are mandating that children be able to read at grade level by the end of 4th grade. They are setting aside funds for extended day instruction, early intervention programs, class size reduction, and professional development.

While there has been a proliferation of reading programs and initiatives across the country, several political and practical challenges remain. Federal efforts to increase consistency across classrooms — by setting reading standards and instructional guidelines — continue to be controversial. Concerns persist about infringing on the autonomy of state and local education agencies. Additionally, there continues to be a gap between instructional theory and actual practice. If schools begin to implement a balanced approach to reading instruction which researchers increasingly recommend, then the curriculum and textbooks will need to revised, and new assessment models will need to be developed.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Background Issues in Reading Achievement

For nearly two decades, two of the dominant themes in education reform have been standards and quality. The need to set more challenging educational standards stemmed, in part, from several decades of comparative international data showing that American students are not measuring up to international standards especially in science and math. This interest was further heightened by a report issued by the National Commission on Excellence in Education in 1983, *A Nation At Risk*, warning that "the educational foundation of America is being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens America's future." Since then, national and state leaders have undertaken several initiatives to improve standards and quality, including the education summit held in Charlottesville, Virginia in 1989, the Goals 2000: *Educate America Act* signed by President Clinton in 1994, and the 1996 summit held by the governors and the nation's top CEOs. Today, 48 states and the District of Columbia have instituted or are in the process of developing academic standards.

Despite these efforts, the issues surrounding the quality of K-12 education are still hotly debated by policymakers as research findings continue to document unimpressive student performance. Data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) show that since 1983, more than 20 million Americans are unable to do basic math, another 25 million lack basic knowledge of the essentials of U.S. history, and over 6 million dropped out of high school completely. Data from the 1997 freshman survey show that about one in four entering college freshmen now require remedial education.

Only a few would dispute the fact that proficient reading skills at the early grades hold the key to success in school and in the workforce. In a complex world of constantly changing technology and communication, it is even more difficult to succeed without strong reading skills. Experts argue that students who are not reading at grade level by the end of 3rd grade experience difficulty throughout their school career, perform poorly in other subjects and may never graduate.[1] Neuroscience research also corroborates the fact that the content and quality of experiences in the first three years of schooling have an immediate impact on later intellectual and physical competence and abilities.[2]

The poor reading performance of American children in the early grades has sounded a national alarm. According to recent data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP, 1994), as many as 40 percent of American 4th graders are not reading at a basic level. This report specifically examines factors that help to explain why children are having reading difficulties at the early grades and explores federal and state governments' efforts to reverse

---

[1] Most of the discussions on reading difficulties and neuroscience research were synthesized from the comprehensive research and findings presented in the works of Scarborough, (1998) and the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) (1997). Scarborough, H.S. (1998). Early identification of children at risk for reading disabilities: Phonological awareness and some other promising predictors. Pp.77-121 in *Specific Reading Disability: A view of the Spectrum*, B.K. Shapiro, P.J. Accardo, & A.J. Capture, eds. Timonium, MD: York Press.; National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. (1997). "30 years of research: what we now know about how children learn to read." Washington, DC: NICHD.

[2] Ibid.

the trend. It does not provide an in-depth analyses of the controversy surrounding reading research, reading pedagogy, or private sector initiatives to curb reading problems.

Trends in Reading Scores

People read for different reasons and they read various types of text. To help understand how reading skills are measured, the NAEP reading framework describes reading as "a dynamic complex interaction between and among the reader and the context of the reading experiences."[3] Based on this description, NAEP tests measure the students' reading skills for three purposes defined in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Reading Purposes

Reading for Literary Experience

Reading for literary experience entails the reading of various literary texts to enlarge experience of human events and emotions, and to enhance both our appreciation of the world and how it is depicted through language. Literary texts used in the NAEP reading assessment included adventure stories, poetry, science fiction, and folktales.

Reading to Gain Information

When reading to gain information, readers are usually focused on a specific topic or point of reference. They are trying to understand and retain the text information. Informative texts used in the NAEP reading assessment included science articles, primary and secondary historical sources, sections of textbook chapters, essays, and a speech.

Reading to Perform a Task

Reading to perform a task involves reading various types of materials for the purpose of applying the information or directions to complete a specific task. As such, readers must focus on how they will actually use the information. The materials used to assess this purpose in the NAEP reading assessment included classified advertisements, directions for completing various projects, and a tax form.

Student performance in the areas measured is summarized on the NAEP reading proficiency scale and reported according to three standard achievement levels: basic, proficient and advanced.

[3] National Assessment Governing Board. (1996). *Reading framework for the 1992 and 1994 National Assessment of Educational Progress*. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Overall, the reading performance of American children, as measured by NAEP, has remained virtually unchanged since 1972 when results were first issued.[4] Some of the recent findings are even more disturbing. In 1994 for example:

- As many as 40 percent of 4th graders, 30 percent of 8th graders, and 25 percent of 12th graders could not read at NAEP's basic level.
- Only 30 percent of 4th graders, 30 percent of 8th graders, and 36 percent of 12th read at the proficient level.
- As few as 7 percent of 4th graders, 3 percent of 8th graders, and 4 percent of 12th graders read at the advanced level.
- Although African American and Hispanic students made some gains in reading since 1972, such gains have not changed the overall reading scores of all students.
- The reading score gap between White and minority students continues. In 1994, 69 percent of African American and 64 percent of Hispanic 4th graders scored below the basic level, compared with 31 percent of White 4th graders.

Factors Leading to Reading Difficulties

According to experts in the field, difficulties in learning how to read result from a combination of factors.[5] In general, children who are most at-risk for reading failure are those who enter school with limited exposure to enriched language programs and who may have little prior understanding of concepts related to phonemic sensitivity, letter knowledge, print awareness, the purpose of reading, and general verbal skills, including vocabulary. Children with severe cognitive deficiencies, early language impairment, attention deficits and speech and hearing impairments may have reading problems. Children raised in poverty, those with limited proficiency in English, and those with parents that read at low levels are more likely than others to encounter reading problems. Likewise, children with less than average intellectual capabilities may have difficulties learning to read and comprehend materials that are read to them.

Available research, including the extensive work of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) suggests that at least five factors hinder reading development in children, irrespective of their socioeconomic background and ethnicity.[6] These factors include a lack of phoneme awareness, difficulty with reading comprehension, a lack of motivation to learn to read, inadequate preparation of teachers, and a lack of standards and accountability.

---

[4] Campbell, J.R., Voekl, K.E., & Donahue, P.L. (1998). *Report in Brief, NAEP 1996 trends in academic progress*. (Publication No. 98-530). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.
[5] Ibid., 1.
[6] Ibid., 1.

Phoneme awareness: A sizable portion of American children, especially at-risk children, come to school under-prepared to read. Children who lack phoneme awareness, the understanding that words are made up of sound segments, may develop reading difficulties. Difficulties in developing phoneme awareness can be linked to genetic or neurological origins, or to a lack of exposure to language patterns and usage during the preschool years. The result is that these children have difficulties linking speech sounds to letters because their decoding skills are belabored and weak. This in turn leads to slow reading and poor comprehension.

Difficulty with reading comprehension: Some children have difficulty reading because they cannot determine meanings from what they read. This could be due to a lack of: understanding of the words used in the text, knowledge of the domains used in the text, familiarity with the semantic and syntactic structures, familiarity with different writing styles, verbal reasoning ability that enables the reader to "read between the lines," or ability to recall verbal information.

A lack of motivation to read: A major factor that predicts children's success or failure in reading is related to a child's motivation to persist in learning how to read even if they have difficulties. Although most children go to school with positive attitudes and high aspirations to succeed, those who encounter reading difficulties sometimes avoid engaging in reading. One of the ways to improve reading skills is to develop strong motivation to practice reading. However, children who have problems reading can easily be discouraged from practicing reading, and this avoidance behavior can, in turn, exacerbate the problem.

Preparation of teachers: Many recent studies and surveys of teacher knowledge about reading development and difficulties indicate that many teachers are underprepared to teach reading.[7] The instructional practices of too many of the nation's more than one million reading teachers to adequately engage children's interest remains a problem. Reforms in federal and state policies have been slow to strengthen teachers' knowledge and skills in this area even with revised course content and new graduation requirements for teacher education programs, demand for more rigorous accreditation standards for institutions, stiffer licensing rules for elementary teachers, and higher quality professional development.

Standards and Accountability: Despite a relatively extensive research base on how children learn to read, opinions continue to differ on the most appropriate ways to teach reading.[8] Critics believe that standards for reading have not been clearly defined because of the ongoing debate about the most appropriate methods to teach reading. While lawmakers and reading

---

[7] U.S. Department of Education. (1997). *America's teachers: Profile of a profession, 1993-94* , (Publication No. 97-460), *Schools and staffing survey in the United States: A statistical profile, 1990-91* (1993). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.; Haselkorn, D & Harris, L. (1998). *The Essential Profession, A national survey of public attitudes towards teaching, educational opportunity and school reform*. Belmont, MA: Recruiting New Teachers, Inc.; National Commission on Teaching and America's Future. (1996) *What matters most: Teaching for America's future*. New York, NY: (NCTAF).

[8] Adams, M.J. (1990). Beginning reading: Thinking and learning about print. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press; Diegmueller, K. (1996). "A war of words: Whole language under siege." *Education Week* (3)15:26; Manzo, K.K. (1998) "NRC panel urges end to reading wars." *Education Week* (3) 17:28.

experts are endorsing a more balanced approach to teaching reading, many state officials and educators are still polarized over using either the "whole-language" or the "phonics" method of instruction. Whole-language focuses on reading for meaning, while phonics is based on letter-sound relationships. Efforts to develop age-appropriate reading standards at the federal level to provide the needed guidelines for teachers and to increase content consistency across classrooms incite a political battle over federal infringement on the autonomy of state and local governments.

Federal Response to Improve Reading Achievement

In response to the national concern that 40 percent of our 4th graders are not reading at a basic level on NAEP, President Clinton proposed the "America Reads Challenge" initiative in his 1998 State of the Union Address. This child literacy plan was designed to strengthen parental involvement in their children's education and to provide tutorial grants to help children read independently by the end of 3rd grade. Although both Congress and the Administration agreed on the need to improve the children's reading skills, they were divided on the best approach to accomplish that goal.

The President proposed mobilizing parents, tutors, and reading specialists to teach children how to read. This approach is based on the assumption that all children are born with natural instincts to learn, and these instincts can be enhanced through tutoring. Research demonstrates that tutoring and enriched early literacy experiences increase children's reading achievement, level of confidence and motivation, as well as their sense of control over their reading ability.[9]

Congress proposed training more reading teachers to ensure that they are adequately prepared for the complex instructional task. This strategy derives from more formal approaches to reading instruction that emphasize the content of what is learned and the sequence in which it is learned.

Despite this difference in proposed strategies, compromise language was worked out to do both during last year's budget negotiations and President Clinton signed the "Reading Excellence Act" into law on October 21, 1998. The purpose of the new law and the measures it contains to curb reading problems at the early grades are discussed in the section that follows.

The Reading Excellence Act

The "Reading Excellence Act" (H.R. 2614) was enacted with three purposes in mind:

1. To help provide children with the readiness skills and support they need in the early grades to learn to read

[9] Topping, K., & Whitley, M. (1990). "Participant evaluation of parent-tutored and peer-tutored projects in reading." *Education Research*, 32 (1), 14-32.; Brailsford, A. (1991). *Paired reading: Positive reading practice. Kelowna*. British Columbia: Filmwest Associates.; Cohen, P.A., Kulik, J.A., & Kulik, C.L.C. (1982). "Educational outcomes of tutoring: A met-analysis of findings." *American Educational Research Journal*, 19,237-248.

2. To teach every child to read by the end of 3rd grade
3. To improve the instructional practices of teachers and other instructional staff in elementary schools

The law emphasizes professional development for reading teachers and includes some provisions for organizing and training thousands of volunteer tutors. Under the Act, the Secretary of Education is authorized to make competitive grants to State Educational Agencies (SEAs). All states are eligible to apply but can only receive one grant during the grant period. The Act authorizes $520 million for FY 1999 and FY 2000 for competitive grants funneled to SEAs to develop literacy programs. The President has proposed an additional $26 million for this program in his FY2000 budget request.

The new law also requires SEAs to use at least 85 percent of their awards to make local reading improvement grants to school districts to:

- provide professional development for teachers based on the best research and practice
- operate tutoring programs after school, before school, during non-instructional periods during the school day, on weekends, and during the summer
- provide family literacy services by forming partnerships with community-based organizations, early childhood organizations, adult education programs, family literacy organizations, public libraries, colleges and universities, and other organizations to improve the teaching of reading and the reading achievement of children and their families

School districts eligible for these grants include those with one or more low-performing schools participating in Title I programs; schools with the highest and second highest enrollment of poor children in the state; and those with the highest and second highest poverty rates in the state.

Grant periods to states are for three years. State grants to districts must be sufficient to support two-year projects. Grants will be awarded to states after July 1, 1999. Each state may use up to 5 percent of its funding for state-level administrative activities, such as technical assistance to local partnerships, and 2 percent for program evaluation and coordination with other literacy-related activities.

Tutorial Assistance Grants (TAGs): The law includes some Tutorial Assistance Grants (TAGs) that would allow parents to choose tutorial programs for their children. These grants would be given to local educational agencies (LEAs) that would compile a list of qualified tutoring programs, and then provide the list to parents to select programs for their children. LEAs would reimburse the tutorial programs on a per-child basis for tutoring services.

Evaluation: New language contained in the law authorizes the Secretary to use grants or contracts to conduct a national assessment of effective literacy programs based on reliable and

replicable research. The Act provides for two levels of evaluation — a national evaluation by the Secretary, and a state-level evaluation. These evaluations are intended to provide Congress with empirical evidence of effective reading programs, including the extent to which the reading skills of the children who participated in these programs have improved.

The law also provides $5 million to the National Institute for Literacy to disseminate information on scientifically-based reading research to all recipients of federal financial assistance under Titles I and VII of this Act, the Head Start Act, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, and the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act.

Other ongoing federal efforts to prepare children at the early grades are described below:

21st Century Community Learning Centers

In January 1999, President Clinton announced a plan to triple funding (from $200 to $600 million) for the 21st Century Learning Center Program, which funds after-school and summer programs throughout the country. The Education Department will give priority to school districts that are ending social promotion by requiring that students meet academic standards in order to move to the next grade. Over 190,000 children are already benefiting from this program, which uses public school facilities and existing resources to provide after-school programs that offer students enrichment activities such as individualized tutoring, college preparation courses, specialized services for students with disabilities, and other recreational activities. The President's proposal would help approximately 1.1 million children each year participate in these programs.

The nationwide demand for expanded after-school programs has made the 21st Century Community Learning Center program one of the most highly competitive programs ever managed by the U.S. Department of Education. Last year the Department received nearly 2,000 applications, requesting more than $550 million to fund extended hours programs.

By targeting the after-school funds to low-income districts that end social promotion, the administration hopes to prevent after-school misconduct, and encourage schools to hold all students accountable for their academic performance. School districts with comprehensive policies to end social promotion must: 1) require students to demonstrate that they have met academic standards at key grade levels in order to be promoted; 2) use valid objective measures and other indicators to determine whether a student has met the standards; 3) strengthen learning opportunities in the classroom through steps such as clear standards, small classes, well trained teachers, challenging curriculum, and the use of proven instructional practices; and 4) provide for the early identification of students who need extra help to meet the standards by providing extended learning time.

Even Start

The Even Start program, crafted by Rep. Goodling (R-PA), and enacted into federal law over a decade ago, supports projects designed to improve educational opportunities for low-income children from birth to age 7, and their parents. With a $115 million appropriations for FY1999, Even Start program serves approximately 31,000 families in 700 locations nationwide. It provides early childhood education, adult education, and parenting education for eligible families. The program requires schools, families and communities to form partnerships and design flexible programs tailored to local needs. It also focuses on quality rather than quantity, and requires consistent and constructive evaluation.

The Department of Education allocates Even Start funds to states from Title I funds. States make competitive partnership grants to local educational agencies and other organizations to initiate projects, with priorities given to proposals targeted toward low-income families. Funds appropriated in FY 1999 would become available in July of 1999, and remain available for obligation through September 30, 2000. States are expected to initiate about 187 new projects designed to improve services for children's literacy and readiness for school, and parental literacy and involvement in their children's education.

Across the country, state governors, lawmakers, educators and parents are also concerned about children's poor reading skills. The discussion in the next section explores state-level initiatives undertaken to address this problem.

State Issues in Early Reading Achievement

At the state level, legislators are keeping a watchful eye on proposed K-3 public education policies that emphasize early reading as low reading scores on state tests continue to mirror national trends. In Massachusetts for example, test results show that 60 percent of 4th graders are not reading at grade level. In Michigan, the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) test scores show that over 51 percent of 4th graders are reading below grade level. The picture is no different in Washington state, where less than half of the 4th graders are meeting the state's standards in reading. These statistics reinforce concerns that current instructional practices are not producing the desired results. Many states have explored other ways to address children's reading problem, including grade retention, designation to special education classes and lengthy remedial programs, but found these approaches to be costly and ineffective.

Governors across the country are eager to find solutions to the reading problem. In Michigan, Governor Engler has proposed a zero tolerance policy, mandating that children entering kindergarten this fall must be able to read by the time they reach 4th grade. Governor Keating of Oklahoma is insisting that children acquire grade-level reading skills by the time they complete 3rd grade. Nine governors - California, Indiana, Iowa, Missouri, Ohio, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Wisconsin and Wyoming - are drawing from brain research and its implications on early childhood care and education to propose new reading programs.

"Building Bright Beginnings" in Indiana," the "Building Blocks for Success" in Iowa, and "Starting Right" in Rhode Island are examples of these new initiatives.

Some state policymakers have undertaken efforts to become better informed about appropriate ways to positively enhance student reading results and turn around low reading scores. As state leaders are reevaluating current reading policies and adopting new ones, they are considering what existing research and best practices say about how children successfully learn to read.

New Policy Initiatives

Several governors have proposed new initiatives to support early reading achievement. Governor Rowland in Connecticut proposed hiring 300 new reading teachers for 1st and 2nd grades. Illinois Governor Jim Edgar plans to expand the state's READS program, which uses senior citizens as mentors and tutors for young children. Governor Locke in Washington proposed the Washington Reading Corps, intended to give teachers and principals the resources they need to mobilize their communities to achieve the ambitious goal to recruit 25,000 volunteers across the state and to have teachers train them to tutor 2nd-5th graders in reading. New York's Governor Pataki has asked the legislature to allocate additional resources to ensure that children who need extra help learning to read get it early. In addition, Pataki implemented his plan in early January to test all 4th graders' reading skills and to aid school districts in offering six-week summer classes for children who need additional help.

Current Approaches and Practices

The following matrix depicts a range of state policies to support early reading achievement. A subsequent detailed description of each policy is provided by state. As the matrix indicates, many governors are requiring accountability and assessments of reading in the early grades, providing grants and funds for research-based reading programs and requiring professional development for teachers. Some states are also mandating increases in instructional time either by lengthening the school day or school year. Several legislatures are now requiring phonics-based instruction, highlighting the gap between what reading experts prescribe and what is actually practiced in the classroom.

SELECTED STATE STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT EARLY READING ACHIEVEMENT								
State	Summer Institutes	Demo Sites	Phonics-based Instruction	Accountability and Assessment	Individual Literacy Plans	Funds and Grants to LEAs	Increased Instructional Time	Prof. Dev.
AL	X	X						
AR				X				
CA			X	X				
CO				X	X			
CT			X	X			X	
FL				X			X	
IL						X	X	X
IN			X			X		X
IA			X					
KY		X	X			X		X
LA						X		
MD				X				X
MI	X			X	X			
MN						X		
MS	X		X	X			X	X
NV						X		
OK				X			X	X
TX	X	X	X	X		X	X	X
UT				X				X
VA						X	X	
WA								X

Examples of Current State Policies

Current state policies related to reading are described below:

Alabama: *The Alabama Reading Initiative: Literacy for All* targets reading performance on three fronts: 1) providing beginning reading instruction to ensure that kindergarten and 1st grade students learn to read quickly and effectively and to prevent reading failure in future grades where intervention efforts are costly, 2) expanding reading power so students will read frequently, broadly, strategically, and thoughtfully, and 3) identifying struggling readers who need intensive intervention instruction beginning in kindergarten. The Alabama Reading Panel

selected Literacy Demonstration Sites that have a goal of 100 percent literacy, and school faculty have agreed to attend a summer academy that will provide extensive training based on proven research. The Alabama Reading Initiative will provide ongoing support and evaluation of Literacy Demonstration Sites that have agreed to frequent observation and on-going evaluation in addition to serving as models of effective reading practices for visiting schools. Higher education faculty members will serve as mentors to the Literacy Demonstration Sites during the 1998-99 school year and host summer academies in 1999 and beyond.[10]

Arkansas: Governor Mike Huckabee introduced the Smart Start Initiative, based on the premise that "all children will meet or exceed grade-level requirements in reading and mathematics by Grade 4." Beginning in the 1998-99 school year, Smart Start focuses on strong accountability with an emphasis on well-defined, high educational standards in reading and math. The program coordinates standards, staff development, student assessment and accountability, and provides a system of rewards for high performance and consistent improvement and focuses rewards and sanctions at the school level. In addition, an Early Literacy Program initiated in 1993 for grades K-3 combines early intervention, one-on-one tutoring, small-group reading instruction and extensive teacher training. The Reading Recovery Program is used in more than 20 percent of schools, supported by funds from foundations and the legislature. Prevention programs include parent-support groups focusing on getting children ready to learn and read.[11]

California: At the end of 1998, the California Board of Education adopted new guidelines returning to phonics as the foundation of reading instruction, and calling for students to learn basic word skills before tackling literature and other material. The reading and language arts "framework" will replace 1987 guidelines that called for students to learn to read by being immersed in literature. Besides shifting philosophies, the new framework urges schools to devote more time to language arts instruction. The guidelines recommend that students in kindergarten through 3rd grade spend a minimum of 2-1/2 hours on language arts each day. Currently, elementary and middle schools are not required to devote specified amounts of time to language arts. The new guidelines make clear that early reading instruction needs to explicitly teach fundamental skills. The new blueprint caps four years of reading reform in California and drives fundamental changes in curriculum, textbooks and teacher training that will affect schools nationwide because of the influence California exerts as the country's largest textbook market.[12]

Colorado: In 1996, the State Board of Education established kindergarten reading readiness levels. Beginning in 1998-99, each district annually must assess reading readiness or literacy and comprehension levels of students in kindergarten or 1st and 2nd or 3rd grades. An individual literacy plan must be developed for students falling behind the literacy levels, and students cannot be promoted from 3rd to 4th grade reading classes if they score below the state level. In

---

[10] Alabama Department of Education, "Report on the Review of Research, Alabama Reading Initiative", February 1998.

[11] Arkansas Department of Education (online). Available at: http://arkedu.state.ar.us/smartstart/overview.html

[12] "California Returns to Phonics: Poor Results from Whole Language Approach Spurred Action," The Los Angeles Times, December 10, 1998, Page A28.

addition, districts must report the percentage of 3rd grade students who: 1) read at or above 3rd grade level, 2) have an individual literacy plan and 3) increase their literacy and reading levels by two or more grades during the year.[13]

Connecticut: The Early Reading Success initiative requires school districts to develop a 3-year plan to improve the reading skills of students in grades K-3. The plan must include 1) the instructional strategies used to teach reading; 2) a process for assessing students at risk by the end of the 1st grade; 3) periodic evaluations of the reading level of students; 4) additional time for remedial instruction for students reading below grade level; 5) in-service training programs; 6) a process for involving parents in addressing the reading problems of their children; 7) data collection and monitoring of program effectiveness and 8) the establishment of school and public library partnerships to improve pre-reading and reading skills. In addition, as a requirement for recertification, teachers must complete at least 15 hours of training in the teaching of reading and reading readiness and assessment of reading performance, including methods of teaching language skills necessary for reading, reading comprehension skills, phonics and the structure of the English language.[14]

Florida: In 1997, Florida passed legislation requiring that remedial instruction be provided to students who have not met district and state-required levels of proficiency. This bill places emphasis on the attainment of reading skills in the early grades, requiring any student who exhibits substantial deficiency in reading skills (based on locally determined assessments conducted before the end of 1st, 2nd, and 3rd grades, or based on teacher recommendation) to be provided with intensive reading instruction. These students will be reassessed following the intensive reading instruction and must continue to be given intensive reading instruction until the reading deficiency is corrected. If the student's reading deficiency is not remedied by the end of the 2nd or 3rd grades, or if the student scores below the performance level determined by the Commissioner on the statewide assessment test in reading, then the student must be retained.[15]

Illinois: In 1998, Illinois established the Reading Improvement Block Grant Program to improve the reading and study skills of students from kindergarten through 6th grade. Funds may be used by school districts to 1) reduce class size in grades K-3 to provide more intensified reading instruction; 2) extend the time devoted in K-3 to intensified reading instruction, either by lengthening the school day or lengthening the school year; 3) create transitional grades for students needing intensified reading instruction, either between the 2nd or 3rd grades; 4) establish reading academies in schools that focus on the mechanics of reading, the application of reading skills, and the reading of rich literature; 5) conduct intense vocabulary, spelling, and related writing enrichment programs that promote better understanding of language and words; 6) increase the availability of reading specialists and

---

[13] Colorado H. 1139, Colorado Basic Literacy Act, became effective, April 22, 1996.

[14] Connecticut H. 5657, introduced by Representative Cameron C. Staples (D), and enacted on May 28, 1998, Public Act #98-243.

[15] Florida S. 1956 became law without the Governor's signature on June 4, 1997. Chapter 97-309.

teacher aides for reading: and 7) train and retrain K-3 teachers to be proficient in the teaching of reading.[16]

Iowa: In early January 1999, Iowa introduced a bill mandating a systematic, phonics-based approach to teaching language arts and communications skills in kindergarten, and to teaching English-language arts in grades one through three in all school districts and accredited nonpublic schools.[17]

Indiana: In January 1999, Indiana introduced a bill that would require as academic preparation for a person to qualify for a standard license in elementary education, the completion of an undergraduate program that contains at least 12 semester hours or the equivalent in the teaching of reading, and techniques, including phonetic and sound processing for the teaching of reading.[18]

In 1997, the state enacted the Reading and Literacy Initiative for a Better Indiana, which includes a Reading Recovery program to ensure early reading achievement. The current budget provides funding for professional development. Certified teacher leaders will train other teachers in a year long academic course.[19]

Kentucky: Kentucky established the Early Literacy Incentive Fund to improve the reading skills of primary students reading at low levels by providing grants to schools to implement successful, reliable, replicable research-based reading models, including phonics instruction. To establish the grant process, the Kentucky Department of Education created the Early Reading Incentive Grant Steering Committee, as well as a Collaborative Center for Literacy Development. The Center will research and train educators in successful models and establish a demonstration and training site for early literacy at each of the public universities.[20]

Louisiana: The Louisiana legislature approved two reading bills during the 1997 legislative session. The legislature then appropriated $30 million in 1997 and $20 million in 1998 for a K-3 Reading and Math Initiative. Funds were distributed to school systems on a per pupil basis and school systems could target the funds where they were deemed to be most needed.[21]

Michigan: In January 1998, Governor John Engler issued an Executive Directive establishing the Reading Plan for Michigan, which aims to have all children reading at grade level by the

---

[16] Illinois H. 2887, introduced by Representative Elizabeth Coulson (R), and enacted on July 24, 1998.
[17] Iowa H. 24, introduced by Assemblyman Ron J. Corbett (R), on January 11, 1999 and referred to the House Committee on Education.
[18] Indiana S. 457, introduced by Senator J. Murray Clark (R), on January 13, 1999, and referred to the Senate Committee on Education.
[19] Dr. Suellen Reed, Indiana Superintendent of Public Instruction, "Indiana Department of Education Moves Forward with Reading and Literacy Initiative." Press Release, Friday, August 1, 1997.
[20] Kentucky S. 186, introduced by Senator John D. "Jack" Westwood (R), and enacted on April 14, 1998.
[21] Louisiana H. 2444 (Act 450), introduced by Representatives Emile "Peppi" Bruneau, Jr. (R), and Francis C. Thompson (D), and signed by the Governor on June 22, 1997.

time they reach the 4th grade.[22] The State Department of Education is charged with developing materials and collateral programs to fulfill the reading plan, including: 1) a set of "Reading Readiness Kits" for parents to ensure that their children are ready to read by age 5; 2) a diagnostic process and instrumentation so that every local school has the tools to assess the reading of each child and can provide each child with an individually focused reading program; 3) a process for monitoring the reading success of each child in a "Reading Progress Portfolio" designed to be included in the child's individual school file. The portfolio will provide the information necessary for children to continue to make progress as they move from grade to grade or if they transfer to another school; 4) the design of the Michigan Summer Reading Program that is prescriptive and research-based to successfully teach children to read.

Minnesota: The 1997 legislature started a small grant program that encourages schools to adopt research-proven reading programs and to train teachers to help K-3 students with problems learn to read. In fall 1997, the Minnesota Department of Children, Families, and Learning sent requests for proposals to schools and was expecting to fund reading programs in about 10-15 schools, for a total of $500,000 during the 1998-99 school year. Districts with higher percentages of students eligible for subsidized lunch have a higher priority for the awards. The school applying for a grant must present evidence of the effectiveness of the proposed reading program. Reading Recovery, Success for All, and similar programs are potentially eligible for funding.[23]

Mississippi: Beginning with the 1998-99 school year, the State Board of Education will develop and implement a Reading Sufficiency Program of Instruction designed to enable each student to read at the appropriate grade level. Each local school board will develop a Reading Sufficiency Plan for its school district that may include the following components: a) sufficient additional in-school instructional time for the development of reading and comprehension skills of the students; b) readiness intervention programs, such as kindergarten programs, extended school day or school year programs, summer school enrichment program and program initiatives to reduce class size; c) utilization of research-based teaching methodologies or strategies for providing direct instruction in phonics, vocabulary and comprehension development, including systematic, intensive, explicit phonics, using decodable vocabulary-controlled texts (texts in which 95 percent of the words are decodable); and d) professional development for assistant teachers, teachers and administrators to assist students in implementing the Reading Sufficiency Program. The State Department of Education will provide in-service training, computer software and certified reading instructors to train local school district personnel. The Department will monitor the delivery of reading instruction in public schools, and report annually on the implementation of the Reading Sufficiency Program in each school district, which will include an assessment of the reading skills of each student for the appropriate grade level.[24]

---

[22] Michigan Governor John Engler, State of the State Address, January 29, 1998, "Next Steps in Education: All 3rd-graders Reading."

[23] Minnesota House File #1, 1997 first special session.

[24] Mississippi H. 246, introduced by Representative George Flaggs, Jr. (D), on January 5, 1999, and referred to the House Committee on Education.

Nevada: The 1997 Nevada legislature adopted a major education reform bill that requires schools with inadequate performance on the standardized achievement test administered statewide in 4th, 8th and 10th grades to adopt approved remedial education programs. A special appropriation funded the remedial programs in schools designated as having inadequate achievement. The remedial program must be one selected from a list of programs found to be effective in improving the academic achievement of pupils in reading, math, writing or science. The Legislative Committee on Education recommends a list of such programs and the State Department of Education has adopted that list.[25]

The 1997 legislature also created the Council to Establish Academic Standards, which was required to establish rigorous standards in English (including reading, composition and writing), mathematics and science by September 1, 1998. Those standards were adopted on August 20, 1998.

New York: In mid-January of 1999, New York State administered for the first time a 4th grade reading test. Administered over a three day period, the test goes beyond the multiple-choice questions of the past by requiring children to read and listen to complex passages of fiction and nonfiction, and to write essays, including a personal one, with correct spelling, grammar and punctuation. The first day incorporated the traditional standardized test that included 28 multiple-choice questions requiring students to fill in a bubble on a computerized form. On the second day, students had to take notes on a fable about a hunter, a lion and a rat that was read aloud, and write out answers based on the story. The third day was the most challenging, consisting of two readings — one fiction, one non-fiction — on the same subject. Students had to answer questions about each, then write a one-page letter incorporating details about both. The new test is being closely watched because it is in the forefront of a national movement back to teaching basics like writing, spelling and grammar, and to do it by 4th grade. Such intensive testing in traditional skills is provoking anxiety and even some indignation among children, teachers and parents who are used to a less structured approach to learning. New York Education Commissioner, Richard Mills, is predicting that scores will be low, in part because this is an unfamiliar test and in part because it is harder than past tests. The free-response portions of the tests will be scored by teachers assembled in hotels and churches on January 29, and results should be posted by April. The scoring session will include several hours of training, after which each teacher will grade test booklets from another school district. Teachers have expressed concern that the training may not be adequate to guarantee that teachers from different districts will apply standards evenly. At the same time they applaud the state's decision to shift its emphasis from strictly multiple-choice testing to measuring skills that students will be able to use outside school, such as comparing and contrasting reading passages. Students will be told they fall into one of four categories ranging from very proficient to not proficient. The state plans to use the scores to determine whether a school is failing. The scores will be closely monitored by parents looking for the best schools for their children.[26]

---

[25] Nevada S. 482, introduced by the Committee on Finance on June 25, 1997, and enacted on July 16, 1997.
[26] Halbfinger, David, "Tests are Over and Students are Relieved," *New York Times*, January 17, 1999, p. 19.

Oklahoma: Beginning in 1998, Oklahoma implemented the Reading Sufficiency Act, which requires students in 1st, 2nd and 3rd grades to be assessed annually by multiple on-going assessments for the acquisition of reading skills for their grade level. Any student found not to be reading at the appropriate grade level will be provided a reading assessment plan, including a program of reading instruction to help the student acquire the appropriate grade level reading skills. The plan will include additional instruction time, tutorial instruction after regular school hours, and utilization of the five essential elements of reading instruction: phoneme awareness, phonics, spelling, reading fluency and comprehension. In addition, each school will establish a committee composed of educators and a certified reading specialist to determine the reading assessment plan for each student for whom one is necessary. A parent or guardian will be included in the development of the reading assessment plan for that student. The Oklahoma Commission for Teacher Preparation will make available in FY 1999, a three-day follow-up professional development institute for teachers who participated in an elementary school reading professional development institute during FY 1998, and provide 5-day initial professional development institutes in elementary school reading for elementary school teachers and instructional leaders and contract for an independent evaluation of the elementary school reading professional development institute.[27]

Texas: To battle a one-in-five failure rate on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) reading test, Governor George W. Bush launched the Texas Reading Initiative in 1996 so that every child would learn to read at grade level by 3rd grade. The Governor has pushed for changes in the Texas education system to promote better reading instruction in the early grades and to give educators new tools in the classroom. These include a rigorous core reading curriculum that is knowledge-based, back to basics, and phonics-driven; a new K-2 reading assessment to detect and correct reading problems early; and Reading Academies, schools-within-schools, for accelerated reading instruction. Other key elements of the Reading Initiative include: increase awareness of students' reading skill levels in K-3; promote ongoing measurement of students' reading skills in K-3 by making available to school districts diagnostic tools that currently exist and newly-designed reading skills inventories; promote reading programs as priority recipients for Academics 2000 funding; showcase a variety of school programs presently used in Texas which are known to successfully develop students' reading skills, especially in K-3; encourage certification reform and emphasize the need for teachers to obtain adequate training to enable them to successfully develop the reading skills of their students; encourage public school districts to develop innovative reading programs. For example, school districts may use the school day and year to make additional time for reading instruction; and convene Reading Summits across Texas to promote the reading initiatives. Two summits were held in 1997 with more than 5,000 people in attendance.[28]

Utah: In January 1999, Utah introduced legislation to establish a child literacy program. The program will focus on children from birth to age 5; involve the families of children in this age

---

[27] Oklahoma H. 2878, introduced by Representative Betty Boyd (R) and enacted, June 9, 1997 with implementation delayed until 1998.

[28] Texas: Office of the Governor (online). Available at: http://www.governor.state.tx.us/Reading/reading_index.html

group, public elementary schools, and communities in a collaborative effort; and have as its goal to assist families in understanding the need for establishing an environment to support literacy, which would include reading aloud to children on a regular basis. The role of the family at level one of the program is to create an environment that supports literacy learning. The role of the elementary schools and communities at level one is to collaborate with each other to identify children up to age 5, to facilitate high quality literacy training and to provide literacy support and resources for parents of children within this age group. The State Board of Education will work closely with the Department of Workforce Services as to the involvement of communities, including the training of child care providers, in the programs established under this section. In addition, the State Board will provide the legislature and the governor an annual report on the effectiveness of the program, together with any recommendations for modifications in or additions to each level. The act will take effect on July 1, 1999.[29]

Virginia: Virginia's Early Intervention Reading Initiative appropriates $6 million to school districts to provide early intervention services to primary grade students who demonstrate deficiencies on a statewide diagnostic literacy assessment, PALS (Phonological Awareness and Literacy Screening), which identifies children in either kindergarten or 1st grade who do not have the necessary early literacy skills. Such intervention programs may include, but are not limited to the use of special reading teachers, trained aides, volunteer tutors under the supervision of a certified teacher, computer-based reading tutorial programs, aides to instruct in-class groups while the teacher provides direct instruction to the students who need extra assistance, or extended instructional time in the school day or year.[30]

Washington: The Successful Reading Act provides funds for professional development in beginning reading instructional strategies. It also establishes grants to assist struggling readers in kindergarten through 6th grade, by providing additional individual instructional time from teachers, tutors or mentor volunteers during the summer, intercessions for schools with year-round schedules or other vacation periods, or during normal school hours. In addition, the bill requires schools requesting funds to develop a plan to assess student reading performance before entry to and upon exit from the program.[31]

In addition, some states are focusing heavily on teacher quality to improve students' reading achievement.

California requires teaching candidates to pass a new Reading Instruction Competence Assessment (RICA). The purpose of the RICA is to ensure that these prospective teachers have learned the knowledge and skills they need to provide effective reading instruction in a balanced, comprehensive program for K-8 students. Candidates must take and pass either the RICA Written Examination or the RICA Video Performance Assessment. The written exam

---

[29] Utah H. 8, introduced by Representative Sheryl L. Allen (R) on January 18, 1999 and referred to the House Committee on Rules.

[30] 1997 Virginia Acts of Assembly, Chapter 924, Item 140.

[31] Washington S. 6509, introduced by Senator Harold Hochstatter (R) on January 20, 1998. Chapter 271 enacted on March 12, 1998. Effective April 1, 1998.

includes open-ended questions as well as multiple-choice questions about reading instruction. The Video Performance Assessment centers on candidate-created videotapes that show the candidate teaching reading. Candidates who select this option submit their videotapes and related documentation for scoring. Both the written exam and the video performance are based on a common set of thirteen specific content areas of reading instruction skills and knowledge which are organized in four content domains, 1) planning and organizing reading instruction based on ongoing assessment; 2) developing phonological and other linguistic processes related to reading; 3) developing reading comprehension and promoting independent reading; and 4) supporting reading through oral and written language development.[32]

Maryland: The State Board of Education voted to require most current public school teachers and all future ones to take college courses on how to teach reading, a move prompted by unsatisfactory reading scores of the state's school children. The new policy reflects a national trend emphasizing teacher competence in reading, but the decision makes Maryland one of only a few states with such rigorous requirements for reading courses. The State Superintendent's office will develop a performance test to determine whether teachers have the required teaching skills. Prospective early childhood and elementary teachers in the state's 22 teacher colleges will have to pass 12 semester hours of coursework in reading. Secondary school teachers are required to take six semester hours, covering topics such as how a child acquires language, how to teach reading through phonics, semantics and syntactics, how to select reading textbooks, and how to use test data to improve teaching. Veteran teachers must take the courses or their equivalents to renew their teaching certificate, within a period of up to 10 years.[33]

Effective Intervention Programs

Some state governors are also turning to intervention programs to address reading difficulties among children. While some are adopting one-on-one tutoring programs, others are using Title I money for small-group tutoring programs, professional development and smaller classes. Studies of these programs including "Success for All" and "Reading Recovery" reading programs provide evidence that intensive instruction in the early grades can reduce enrollments in special education programs by half to three-quarters. Such services typically cost between $2000 to $4000 per pupil.

Success for All (SFA) is a structured and intensive early intervention program designed to bring at-risk students quickly to a level at which they can profit from high-quality classroom instruction. The program is intended for pre-kindergarten through middle grade elementary school learners. SFA was developed by a team of educational researchers at Johns Hopkins University. By focusing resources on prevention — which translates into developmentally appropriate preschool and kindergarten programs and substantial staff development along with curricular and instruction support for primary grade teachers — SFA hopes students will be

---

[32] California Education Code Section 44283, Assembly Bill 1178, Cunneen, Chapter 919.

[33] "Maryland Raises Standards for Teachers," Ellen Nakashima, Washington Post Staff Writer, *The Washington Post*, Thursday, July 30, 1998, Page A01.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

successful learners from the start. Its goal is grade-level (or near grade-level) performance for all students in reading and other skill areas by 3rd grade, and a better performance thereafter.

SFA uses certified teachers as one-to-one reading tutors to help students succeed in reading. Tutors use the students' regular language arts/reading curriculum as a basis for instruction. Students are regrouped each day from their heterogeneous classes into homogenous ability groups for 90 minutes of reading. Students' progress in the reading program is regularly assessed after eight-week periods. The assessments are used to place students in one-on-one tutoring relationships or to move students to more appropriate reading groups. Parent involvement is a central element of the SFA model. The family support team works closely with parents to keep them apprised of what their children are doing in school. The school must make a substantial initial investment. In addition to a significant commitment of resources (money for new positions, materials, staff development and time), the school must agree to reconceptualize its preschool through grade three curricular priorities, organization and scheduling.[34]

Reading Recovery (RR) is an early intervention program designed to reduce reading failure. It is a one-on-one tutoring pullout program for 1st grade students who are experiencing difficulty in learning to read. RR was developed and studied initially by New Zealand educator Marie Clay. In the United States, RR training is sponsored by Ohio State University. RR is based on the idea that intensive high quality intervention in the first grade is a cost-effective strategy for preventing long-term difficulties and reading failure. The goal is to intervene with the child who is experiencing difficulty early on before a set pattern of ineffective strategies develops. Children are discontinued from the program when they are judged to be able to perform at the average reading level in their classroom. Students are selected into RR on the basis of a variety of criteria, including standardized tests and other early literacy assessments. Tutoring sessions in RR are conducted one-on-one with a trained RR teacher. Staff development for teachers involves participation in a year long in-service program. As teachers participate in training, they also implement the program with their children. The trainer (teacher leader) critiques and evaluates the classroom performance of the teachers with their students. To begin the program, a school must have access to a trained, certified RR teacher leader. The school must also have extra teaching spots allocated since RR teachers may spend from half to all day tutoring students.[35]

Trends in Reading Assessment

As a balanced approach to teaching reading gains increasing support, there is clearly a need to develop new assessment models to accurately measure reading skills. While many assessment models are being developed especially in the private sector, this paper does not recommend nor advocate any specific model. Rather, the models cited in this section are used purely as promising examples.

---

[34] Urban and Suburban/rural Special Strategies for Educating Disadvantaged Children, U.S. Department of Education, Office of the Under Secretary, pages 2-29-2-31.
[35] Ibid., pages 2-37-2-39.

One assessment model that is showing some promise is the Developmental Reading Assessment, which aims to help K-3 teachers diagnose young children's reading difficulties. Developed by a group of 11 reading teachers in Ohio, it provides teachers with a means to evaluate each student's reading skills and plan individualized remedial strategies. The program is relatively straightforward: teachers meet with each student one-on-one. They listen to each student read a story from a grade-level book and record several factors using a coding system, including:

1. Does a student stumble over a word, does he or she dissect the word and sound it out?
2. Does the student read fluently or word-by-word?
3. Can the student retell the story in his or her own words?

The exam only takes 15 minutes per student, and some states have mandated the tool to be used in many elementary school classrooms. Washington state requires the test for all of its 2nd graders. Louisiana requires it in all 2nd and 3rd grade classes within 30 days of the beginning of school. Before the assessment was used, Louisiana schools used several exams to test reading ability at the beginning and end of the year, making comparisons difficult. The program also has caught on in several New Jersey school districts. The assessment was heavily influenced by the techniques of the Reading Recovery immersion program, which targets 1st graders with poor reading skills through one-on-one tutoring, individually tailored to a child's weaknesses.

A portfolio assessment program, developed by researchers at Educational Testing Service and implemented in South Brunswick, New Jersey, represents another assessment model to document children's reading. In this project, a portfolio containing reading and writing activities is developed for each child. Every year, individual portfolios are reviewed and rated by pairs of teachers on a difficulty scale ranging from Early Emergent to Advanced Independent level. The rating provides information that shows a child's reading proficiency level as well as the progress the child has made.

CONCLUSIONS

Educators have long argued about the best approaches for teaching reading. Disappointing NAEP and statewide assessment reading scores have sparked a heated debate between proponents of phonics-based approaches and whole-language supporters. However, recent research indicates that there is no longer reason to debate approaches.[36] Reading experts agree that no one method alone works best for all children under all conditions, nor will one particular strategy reverse troublesome NAEP scores.[37] What works is a balanced approach. Moreover, a balanced approach to reading instruction is not a compromise. It combines the most effective practices associated with both whole language and phonics approaches. It unites the explicit teaching of skills needed to decode words and language-rich, literature-rich instruction.

---

[36] Diegmueller, K. (1996). "The best of both worlds." *Education Week* (3)15:26.
[37] Ibid.,1.

Teachers can increase and improve reading skills by using a variety of approaches that acknowledge students have different strengths, weaknesses, and reading styles. The more strategies teachers have at hand, the more they are able to switch gears and tailor their approach to the student's needs, and the more likely children are to learn to read well.

As reading difficulties in the early grades have captured the nation's attention, the need to explore new ways to provide quality reading programs has become a national priority. New laws are being enacted and new policies formulated at the federal and state level to improve reading achievement. Many new reading initiatives are being instituted and authorities are prescribing new methods of teacher preparation and reading instruction. Federal efforts to increase consistency across classrooms — by setting reading standards and instructional guidelines — continue to be controversial. Concerns persist about infringing on the autonomy of state and local education agencies. Meanwhile, many states are proceeding with their own plans and strategies to improve reading achievement of young children. Additionally, there is a continuing gap between instructional theory and actual practice. If schools begin to implement a balanced approach to reading instruction that researchers increasingly recommend, then the curriculum and textbooks will need to be revised, and new assessment models will need to be developed. As we head into the next millennium, all stakeholders are poised waiting to see how these efforts culminate in improving the reading skills of our nation's children.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Adams, M.J. "Beginning Reading: Thinking and Learning About Print." Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990.

Brailsford, A. (1991). "Paired Reading: Positive Reading Practice." Kelowna, British Columbia: Filmwest Associates, 1991.

Cohen, P.A., Kulik, J.A., & Kulik, C.L.C (1982). "Educational Outcomes of Tutoring: A Meta-analysis of Findings." *American Educational Research Journal*, 19,237-248.

Diegmueller, K. (1996). "A War of Words: Whole Language Under Siege." *Education Week* (3)15:26.

Diegmueller, K. (1996). "The Best of Both Worlds." *Education Week* (3)15:26.

Education Commission of the States. Clearinghouse Notes "What Policymakers Need to Know About Student Reading." Denver, CO: 1998.

Education Commission of the States. Clearinghouse Notes "Governors' Proposals: State Policy and Public Education, 1998. Denver, CO: 1998.

Haselkorn, D & Harris, L. "The Essential Profession, A National Survey of Public Attitudes Towards Teaching, Educational Opportunity and School Reform." Belmont, MA: Recruiting New Teachers, Inc., 1998.

Lyon, R.G. "Testimony on Children Literacy Before the U.S. Senate." Washington, DC: April 28, 1998.

Manzo, K.K. (1998) "NRC Panel Urges End to Reading Wars." *Education Week* (3) 17:28.

National Commission on Teaching and America's Future. "What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future." New York, NY: NCTAF, 1996.

National Assessment Governing Board. "Reading framework for the 1992 and 1994 National Assessment of Educational Progress." Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, 1996.

National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. "30 Years of Research: What We Now Know About How Children Learn to Read." Washington, DC: NICHD, 1997.

Saxton, L. J., Astin, A. W., Horn, W. S., Mahoney, K. M. "The American Freshman: National Norms for Fall 1997. Los Angeles: Higher Education Research Institute, UCLA.

Snow, C.E and Burns, S.M. (Eds). "Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children." Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 1998.

Topping, K., & Whitley, M. (1990). "Participant Evaluation of Parent-tutored and Peer-tutored Projects in Reading." *Education Research*, 32 (1), 14-32.

U.S. 105th Congress. "Higher Education Amendments of 1998 (H.R. 6)." Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Press, 1998.

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, "America's Teachers: Profile of a Profession, 1993-94." Washington, DC, 1997.

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, "Digest of Education Statistics." Washington, DC, 1997.

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, "Dropout Rates in the United States: 1995." Washington, DC, 1997.

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, "NAEP 1992 Reading Report Card for the Nation and the States." Washington, DC, 1994.

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, "NAEP 1994 Reading Report Card for the Nation and the States." Washington, DC, 1996.

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, "NAEP 1996 Trends in Academic Progress." Washington, DC, 1996.

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, "Projections of Education Statistics to 2007." Washington, DC, 1997.

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, "Reading Literacy in the United States: Findings From the IEA Reading Literacy Study." Washington, DC, 1996.

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, "Schools and Staffing Survey in the United States: A Statistical Profile, 1990-91." Washington, DC, 1993

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, "The Condition of Education." Washington, DC, 1998.

U.S. Department of Education. Office of the Under Secretary, "Urban and Suburban/Rural Special Strategies for Educating Disadvantaged Children." First Year Report, 1994.